

Speech by Ms Hill-Marta Solberg

Chair of the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region

Arctic Council Meeting in Salekhard

25-26 October 2006

Mr Chairman, Mr Governor, Ministers, dear friends of the Arctic

I am extremely pleased to have the honour to represent the Arctic parliamentarians at this Arctic Council meeting in Salekhard, and to have the opportunity to address you distinguished representatives of the Arctic.

The Arctic parliamentarians held a successful Conference in Salekhard in 1998. At that time Governor Neelov was a member of the Standing Committee of Arctic parliamentarians. I am delighted that it is now my turn to visit Salekhard, this historic city in the Russian Arctic.

The Arctic parliamentarians held their seventh conference in Kiruna, Sweden, in August this year. The main topics discussed here were;

- The International Polar Year
- The opening of an Arctic Sea Route, and
- The possibilities and limitations in establishing a legal regime in the Arctic

All these issues are well reflected in the Conference Statement from Kiruna.

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight one of these issues, namely the possibility to strengthen the legal framework relevant to the Arctic region. The outcome of the deliberations is reflected in paragraph 28 of the Conference Statement, and is directed to you, the governments of the Arctic Region. I quote:

“In light of the impact of climate change, and the increasing economic and human activity,(to) initiate, as a matter of urgency, an audit of existing legal regimes that impact the Arctic and to continue the discussion about strengthening or adding to them where necessary”

End of quote.

We parliamentarians strongly believe the impact of climate change to be a matter of urgency. The climate change already has a strong impact on the living conditions of the Arctic indigenous peoples. And if the ice disappears for large parts of the year, we will see an explosion in human activities in the Arctic. We need to find ways to regulate this activity and keep ahead of the development.

In recent years we have seen and experienced in many countries a strong and increasing interest in the Arctic region. This interest is due, not least, to the expected substantial quantity of energy resources and other natural resources in the Arctic. However, the climate change in the region and its projected wider impact has also contributed to this focus.

On behalf of the Arctic parliamentarians I would like to thank the Russian Chairmanship for their efforts to place Arctic issues higher on the international agenda, and to welcome Norway as Chair of the Council. We, as politicians and people of the North, have a responsibility to turn this increasing interest into something positive for the people living in the Arctic. Together we can send a strong Arctic message about the opportunities and challenges in the region. Together we must face our common challenges, and secure a sustainable basis for future generations of Arctic peoples to build on.

Thank you for your attention.